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Citizens' Social Construction of Sustainable Development in Mexico

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Abstract

This research study examines the discussion and solution of environmental problems taken on by students, citizens, and government in northwest Morelos, a state near Mexico City. Public discussion of environmental problems in three local newspapers between 2000 and 2004, in-depth interviews with the main actors involved, and survey results of a probabilistic sample of citizens and lower- and upper-secondary students are examined. The results describe students' perception of environmental problems and how debate arises, evolves, and is solved, as well as how citizens, the government, and students contribute to constructing citizenship, the environment, and democracy.

Citizens' Social Construction of Sustainable Development in Mexico

Citizenship education in Mexico, as in the rest of the world, has reacted to varying social and historical aspirations and conditions. Given that the Mexican State itself has been transformed, since the nineties a contribution to the political transition has been sought through a non-doctrinaire civic education (Maggi, Hirsch, Tapia and Yurén, 2003, pp. 923-942) that demanded a new concept of citizenship (Tapia, Barba, Elizondo and Fernández, 2003, pp. 987-1006). Such a concept of citizenship would not only imply civil, political, and social rights and responsibilities stemming from membership in a political community (i.e. by being Mexican), but rather adhere to the classic concept proposed by Aristotle: "Being a citizen means being a public power-holder; a citizen is someone who participates in collective

decisions" (Quoted in Santillán, 2003, p. 339). Hence, it is neither a question of passively waiting, nor of adhering to a paternalistic government-citizen scheme, in which the latter is subject to the benevolence of the former and where the premise that citizens are minors incapable of distinguishing good from evil prevails. Immanuel Kant thought that this way of understanding the relationship between the government and its citizens accounted for the worst imaginable despotism (Santillán, p. 337).

The new citizenship education¹ fostered by the Mexican State has intended to offer a new alternative to the previously existing civic education, which was predominantly prescriptive, instructional, and merely informative. The current option has consisted in exercising active citizenship that would not only lead to acknowledging membership in a social and political community, but also to exercising rights



and responsibilities related to matters of common concern; thus, it has also aimed at skills and attitude development. This research study was undertaken three years ago within such an initial formulation of the problem, and had a twofold purpose:

- To learn how the school, family, media, and an active citizenry contribute to the understanding of the environmental problems faced by Mexicans in this part of the country (i.e. the State of Morelos).
- To ascertain how responsibilities were delimited and assumed, and actions undertaken, to contribute to the construction of sustainable development – a term that encompasses our understanding of environmental problems.

These two objectives led to outlining a number of questions, only one of which will be dealt with in this paper:

How is the discussion of local environmental problems tackled by students, citizens, and government? What responsibilities do they assume and what actions do they undertake to contribute to the solution of such problems?

Methodology

In order to answer this question, we mainly adhered to the approach that views the environment to be a social construction (Lezama, 2004), and that one way of accomplishing such construction is through political action based on citizen participation and the debate on local environmental problems (Bourdieu, 1991; Thompson, 1991). Using this approach – discussed in the conceptual framework section – public debate on environmental problems was analyzed based on three of the state's main newspapers: *La Unión de Morelos*, *El Diario de Morelos*, and *La Jornada Morelos*—and their respective supplements *Madre Tierra*, *El Zapatista Ilustrado*, and *La Caracola*. The reference period covers April 2000 through September 2004.

Open interviews with actors specific to this debate, as well as with lower- and upper-secondary students and teachers, were conducted. The intention behind these interviews was to deepen our understanding of how citizens perceive and understand environmental problems, how schools conduct citizenship education, and how citizens define their own responsibility as opposed to others'. Even though students do not participate directly in the debate, they are part of the public educational discourse and play a decisive role in the construction of an environmental culture that is fostered through the school.

Table 1

Interviews

General Description	Number
Government officials	2
Local authorities*	3
Associations	4
Upper secondary teachers	6
Lower secondary teachers	7
Upper secondary students	6
Lower secondary students	16

Note. In the case of local authorities, two of the interviews were made collectively: one involved three "comuneros" from Coajomulco and the other was made to the complete Comitee of Communal Goods of Santa María Ahuacatitlán.

Although this paper focuses on the analysis of the debate on environmental problems, it also relies on the results of a survey we conducted on the perception and prioritization of environmental problems by lower- and upper-secondary school students, and citizens older than 35. This survey used a probabilistic sample of homes in the localities situated around the Apatlaco micro basin—the most densely populated and polluted region in the state of Morelos. The sample also included a number of lower- and upper-secondary schools in the same localities (see Tables 2 and 3).

**Table 2**

General characteristics of the population surveyed during the first phase of the study: June – July, 2004.

General characteristics of the sample First phase June – July 2004	Sample
General	General n= 2158
Gender	Male n= 862 Female n= 1285
Age ranges	Teenagers 10-17 years n= 463 Youngsters 18-29 years n= 308 Adults 30-40 years n= 596 Adults 41-50 years n= 386 Adults 51 a 60 years n= 219 Adults 61 a 70 years n= 101 Over 71 years n= 73
Years of schooling	No schooling n= 77 Elementary n= 495 Secondary n= 788 Upper secondary n= 302 Technical school n= 75 University n= 237
Surveys per municipality	Cuernavaca n= 1141 Temixco n= 232 Xochitepec n= 122 Jiutepec n= 69 Huitzilac n=594

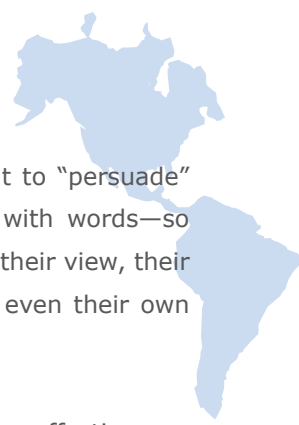
Tabla 3

Questionnaires applied to lower and upper secondary students during the second phase of the study: June 2005.

Total sample of lower secondary schools	Municipality / Neighborhood	388
Miguel Salinas,	Cuernavaca, Acapantzingo	47
Francisco González Bocanegra	Cuernavaca, Altavista	62
Himno Nacional Mexicano	Cuernavaca, Santa María Ahuacatlán	28
Gral. Mariano Escobedo	Huitzilac, Tres Marías	26
2 de abril	Temixco, Acatlipa	92
Mariano Matamoros	Xochitepec, Centro	56
Técnica No 16	Huitzilac, Tres Marías	13
Técnica No 4	Temixco, Azteca	64
Total sample of upper secondary schools	Municipality / Neighborhood	399
Escuela Preparatoria No 2	Cuernavaca, Altavista	49
COBAEM No 2	Jiutepec, Atlacomulco	123
CETIS 44	Cuernavaca, Altavista	91
CETIS 43	Xochitepec, Real del Puente	93
CBTA 154	Huitzilac, Centro	43
Total sample		787

The ensuing section presents the conceptual framework, the research findings, and a discussion of the debate on how citizens and government assume their responsibilities and rights in order to confront

environmental problems. The study is complemented with the results of the survey on how citizens and secondary students perceive and assume local environmental problems.



Conceptual Framework for Examining Citizens' Construction of Sustainable Development

The idea of educating participatory citizens used in this study is based on Aristotle's above-mentioned concept of citizenship, as well as on the concept of active citizenship. The latter has been used as the foundation of various citizenship education reform proposals in Mexico and elsewhere in the world (Cuadra E., 2003). In Great Britain, since 2002, under this concept of active citizenship students are expected to develop skills to evaluate environmental problem-solving alternatives and to lead change at various levels of society. They are also sought to take part in community-based and school activities. In doing so, it is expected that they learn how to assume personal and collective responsibilities, both towards themselves and towards others.

Our primary conceptual framework will be the theoretical proposals put forward by Bourdieu, Thompson, and Majone. Bourdieu suggests that political action through language and its symbolic power is a necessary initial step for citizen participation because "agents—who are part of the social world [they intend to change]—possess (more or less adequate) knowledge of this world, and because they are capable of acting on that social world by acting on their knowledge of this world" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 127). Political action is triggered by denouncing the breach of this tacit agreement with the established order defined by the original "doxa"—i.e. the opinions, beliefs and judgments shared on an everyday basis by the individuals who make up the social world (Thompson, 1998, p. 406).

Political subversion presupposes a cognitive subversion through a conversion of the worldview (Thompson, p. 128) that is capable of creating a "paradoxical pre-view"—utopia, project, or program—a "pre-dictive" discourse that aims at achieving the goal of what is said, and a "performative" discourse that attempts to act through speech; as Majone points

out, the participants in a debate want to "persuade" their interlocutors—i.e. to do things with words—so that they can get the latter to change their view, their perception of things and, if possible, even their own values.

Bourdieu claims, however, that the effectiveness of this heretical discourse does not lie in some force inherent in language or its author, but rather in a peculiar relationship between the language authorized to speak about environmental problems and the dispositions of the authorizing group, whereby the group arrogates to itself the powers to use it, too (Bourdieu, p. 128-129). This means that the force with which a group or an individual participating in a debate speaks lies:

- in the social authority that he/she/it has constructed, based on the social institution that authorizes him/her/it to speak and to use a given type of language—whether it is a political party, a government title or, simply, as part of a group or of the civil society.
- in the relationship between the speaker's social authority and a number of dispositions prevailing in society—e.g. biases towards types of perceptions, practices, and attitudes—to resonate with what is said.

In their inception and development, groups are initially established as *practical groups* and are later acknowledged as *instituted groups*, once they have constructed a classification principle capable of creating the distinctive set of features that characterizes their members over and above other characteristics, like gender, age or origin. Such is the case of the tree guardians and the co-owners or communal land-holders in our research study, as we shall show. It is paradoxical that these less-powerful emergent groups often find their greatest opposing force in the orthodoxy of those who do **not** resist domination, because they find nothing to complain about in the social world as it is and accept a universal discourse permeated with the



simplicity and transparency of common sense, which in turn imposes itself upon them through the devaluation of the political game and the depoliticization of discourse—processes that are moreover assumed as natural in the prevailing social order (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 129-132). This struggle between the orthodoxy and heterodoxy of political statements and propositions is often summarized as the opposition between what is politically expressible in the political field and what is beyond discussion, that is to say, that which is tacitly accepted without discussion or analysis by those who confront each other from explicit political positions.

Following this framework (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 302; Thompson, 1991), the following analysis of the environmental debate will not be semiotic, focused on the internal make-up of discourse, but rather social and historical. We will analyze the strategic role of discourse (for persuading and influencing public decision-making) as part of exercising governmental and citizen power in terms of its ability to convince and its credibility. Through this analysis, we intend to recognize the actors' dispositions—the *habitus*, according to Bourdieu—as well as the sense with which they act and conceive the political game in which they take part, both in their capacity as government functionaries and as citizens.

Our starting point is an interpretation of the doxas. We then go on to analyze the social conditions for the creation of discourse and actions in the environmental field, taking account of the spatial-temporal venue in which they are expressed, enacted, and embedded, as well as how such actions are seen, heard, and read by the main characters in the environmental debate. We conclude with an argumentative analysis based on Giandomenico Majone's (1997) proposal and on "examples of communication" which, in Thompson's words, "actually occur [...] a conversation between friends, a classroom interaction, a newspaper editorial, a television program [...] i.e. linguistic units that generally exceed the limits of one sentence" (Thompson, 1998, p. 415).

We will also go into how the "set of dispositions that renders agents prone to act and react in a given way" (Thompson, 1991, p. 13; Bourdieu) contributes to creating society and the social institutions comprising it when they are mobilized within the environmental debate, and how such dispositions translate into practical abilities, since they are relevant or (irrelevant) collective forms of attending to and engaging in the problems of sustainable development. Such social forms not only express the status of environmental problems, but they also act through their words and their mobilization: by obeying, disobeying, being irreverent, or contenting themselves with accepting "things as they are."

Eventually, that set of dispositions becomes a series of "sense" abilities for those participating in a debate: on the one hand, we can identify a *sense of orientation* that guides speakers' practices and expressions without determining their actions and inclinations; on the other, a *practical sense*, a sense for the game, of what is or is not appropriate in different circumstances—but this is a form of being rather than a form of thinking.

Bourdieu warns us, however, that practices, perceptions, and attitudes are not only a mechanical product of the *habitus*—i.e. of a set of dispositions—but rather of the relationship between said *habitus* and the participants' position in a debate within the field in question; that is, they depend on the participants' economic, cultural, and symbolic capital, i.e. on their material wealth, their knowledge, on other cultural abilities, and on their accumulated prestige. Certainly, these capitals evolve together with institutions and enable such wealth to be both selectively appropriated by individuals and implicitly recognized as symbolic power by those participating in a field, whether these are benefiting most from or exerting most power in that field. Depending on the agents' position in the structure of a field, this recognition is essential for exerting power and, according to Bourdieu, for practicing a symbolic violence based on calls for trust,



loyalty, personal commitment, solidarity, and other values from those participating in such and such a field, e.g. the environmental field.

Bourdieu's theoretical framework is complemented with the notion of public sphere—which he himself puts forward—and with a few points about persuasion and argumentation. The concept of public sphere refers to what, since ancient Greece, has provided for rational-critical debate of public concerns, i.e. the concerns of everyone (Thompson, 1996, p. 1)—in our case, the environmental problems of Morelos, of the country, and of the world.

It should not be forgotten that, historically, the public sphere took on the task, inherited by the liberals (Gingold, 2000, p. 481), of being the venue where mediation takes place between the State and civil society, between private and public life, i.e. the venue where issues of everybody's concern—such as the environmental problem vis-à-vis the power of the State and of the interest groups prevailing in society—are discussed. Nor should it be forgotten that the debate per se is of no concern in public discussion, but rather the possibility of exerting influence on the interlocutors, in their capacity as citizens or as members of the political class or government officials.

However, the public sphere has deteriorated, partly because the crises of political representation have worsened, endangering the democratic utopia, and partly because this took place within an extended historical process in which the State progressively monopolized the responsibility for managing citizens' welfare, while the most powerful organized interest groups managed to impose their agendas, and the institutions that provided a forum, i.e. the everyday venues of public discussion and the *media* (written press, radio and television), became increasingly transformed. As a result of this transformation of the public sphere, many of its *communicative* products are false, contradictory, absurd, or simply superficial, often having the obvious intention of trivializing some

topics so that they become accepted as common sense. This is no accident: it is done with an obvious political intention, as many of such discourses are part of an ideological mechanism's strategy for exerting power through simulation—on spectators, publics, and citizens.

This should perhaps not be surprising, however. Giandomenico Majone (1997) claims that not even public policymakers can do without argumentation and persuasion in formulating public policies. He also reminds us that rhetoric, i.e. the art of persuasion, partly consists in the possibility of *doing things with words*, and he claims that positive results are obtained when it is applied to public discussion: "In free debate, persuasion is a bilateral exchange, a method for mutually learning through discourse. True debate not only enables participants to defend their interests and opinions but, as a consequence of the process, also encourages them to adjust their view of reality and even to modify their values" (Majone, 1997, p. 42).

These various nuances provide for debate in the public sphere to be capable of contributing to the construction of social institutions: "that stable set of social relations that empowers or bestows on individuals power, status, and various types of resources... through which they have the authority to speak and the others recognize that what is said by the former is acceptable" (Thompson, 1991, p. 8-9). This is why the analysis of public debate is so valuable, since apart from the results of the debate, the debate itself is formative as it contributes to citizenship development and to the construction of social institutions.

Public Debate, Students' and Citizens' Perception and Disposition to Deal with Local Environmental Problems

Environmental education in Mexico has been part of the contents of various subjects since 1972 in primary education, and since 1974 in secondary education. Almost from its inception, environmental education was



part of citizenship education, included in the contents of civic education in both primary school and secondary school, although a stronger emphasis was given to natural sciences and geography on the first level, and to biology on the second. At the secondary school level, efforts have been made to have students play a significant role in the process involved in education in values, and to actively engage in decision-making to deal with environmental problems (Sánchez, 2002, p. 16). This formative purpose is retained in the Civic and Ethical Education Curriculum (PFCyE, as per its acronym in Spanish) (DGDC, SEB-SEP, 2005, p. 19) that forms part of the national Secondary Education Reform implemented in 2006 (DGDC, SEB-SEP, 2006, p. 17). Environmental education is also included here, but as one of the problems of citizenship education. It is also posited that “reading and discussing the news should be encouraged on an ongoing basis” (DGDC, SEB-SEP, 2005, p. 26); therefore, news is recommended as a teaching resource that should be permanently available, together with the textbook. One of the noteworthy differences, however, is that now the PFCyE sets forth much more emphatically than previous curricula the formulation of “work projects” centered on the solution of environmental problems and on information-handling in the *media*; work projects are intended to combine research, analysis, and social participation activities, and thus to result in integral learning (DGDC, SEB-SEP, 2005, pp. 23, 27-29, 31-32, 51-52, 71-72). Under this approach to education for an active—*informed*, committed, and participating—citizenry, the concept of citizenship and environmental education that merely aims at awareness-raising or instruction is inadequate.

However, overcoming the instructional character of civic education has not been easy, and the problem has persisted in many other countries (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald and Schultz, 2001, p. 14). Even though many civic education teachers have attempted to train their students in critical thinking, in actual practice an “instructional” approach has prevailed, with facts being passed down through textbooks and

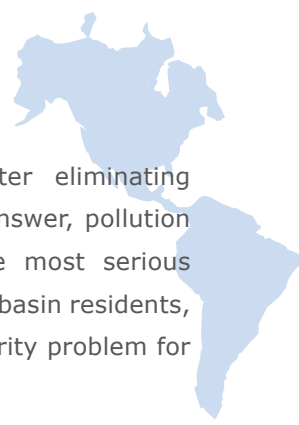
oral exposition. Thus, it has been contended that some phenomenological- and constructivist-oriented theoretical and methodological trends appear to hold more promise for clarifying and developing ethical values. All considered, the fundamental proposition appears to be that:

Only critical judgment arising from [the lessons’] concrete application to the conditions typical of our reality may determine their usefulness to construct a freer, more just, more pluralistic, and less dogmatic society (Maggi et al., 2003, p. 939).

This is perhaps why in many parts of the world students are more prepared to learn about political problems through direct participation, rather than simply opting for obtaining information about or mentioning them without specifically discussing or experiencing them. Political sensitivity and political apathy are closely linked to moral sensitivity (QCA, 1999, p. 10), but they require a specific treatment which apparently needs to be approached in a practical way. This has also proved to be important in Mexico.

The 2000 National Youth Survey (ENJ, as per its acronym in Spanish) revealed that politics as a conversation topic is absent for 70% of Mexican youth aged between 12 and 14. Nevertheless, more than 83% of youths of all ages would be willing to participate in issues of a public nature, such as “respect for indigenous peoples,” “defense of the environment,” “peace,” and “human rights” (INJ, 2002, p. 305).

Likewise, on an international level the media have been shown to have a powerful influence as a source of political information and support for credibility. Television ranks first (86%), followed by the written press (68%) and the radio (55 %) (INJ, 2002, p. 11). In Mexico, 62% of youth refer to television as their most frequent source of information, and 39% of them claim that it is through this medium that they have learned the most about politics (INJ,



2002, p. 284 and 291, respectively). According to the information collected by the Mexican Federal Government, the percentage of youth who hold a similar opinion is even greater: 74% (Secretaría de Gobernación [Secretariat of the Interior], 2003). These percentages double the figure for those youth who state that the home and the school are the main source of their political formation. All of this suggests that public debate on social problems can be not only informative, but also formative. This is probably one of the reasons why the Civic and Ethical Education Curriculum for secondary schools includes “Youth in the contemporary world: Committed, participating, and informed citizens” as one of its topics (DGDC, SEB-SEP, 2006), and suggests that students follow up on controversial news and organize a debate as part of their learning process.

The previous points not only show the complexity and formative significance of public debate, but also how such complexity intensifies in the context of a political transition like the one Mexico is experiencing. Mexicans’ public dissatisfaction is political, but also juridical, and it has led citizens to assert various types of citizenship: cultural, racial, gender, and ecological (García Canclini, 1995), as is the case with Morelos and other parts of Mexico.

Public debate on environmental problems in Morelos has focused on six topics: the construction of a shopping center on the grounds of the former Casino de la Selva hotel; pollution in the Apatlaco River; the cutting and spoiling of the forest in the Chichinautzin biological corridor and in the Huitzilac municipality, pollution and other urban problems in San Antón and Salto de San Antón, and the construction of an ecological park in Acapatzingo.

On the other hand, according to our citizen and student survey—hereinafter “the survey”—household waste comes up as the most significant environmental pollution problem for citizens and students in the San Antón micro basin, while logging is the greatest

problem detected in Huitzilac. After eliminating household waste as an alternative answer, pollution of ravines and rivers becomes the most serious environmental problem for the micro basin residents, while illegal logging remains the priority problem for citizens and students in Huitzilac.

The construction of a COSTCO and a Comercial Mexicana store on the grounds of what used to be the Casino de la Selva Hotel was perhaps Cuernavaca’s most widely known public environmental debate between 2000 and 2006, both locally, nationally, and internationally. The debate arose when Cuernavaca’s civil society became aware that the abandoned hotel grounds had been sold for building a shopping center. The main arguments of civil society were that the hotel’s trees and mural paintings, which are works of art of international standing, should be protected. For reasons difficult to understand, for the mobilization and organization of Cuernavaca’s urban civil society (to set it apart from that of Huitzilac, which we will discuss shortly), wanting to act through words—as Bourdieu would say—is more attractive in relation to trees and mural paintings than in relation to household waste and forests. In other words, there is a stronger disposition and force in society to get organized and fight for the city’s trees and natural-artistic heritage than for the forest and household waste.

Furthermore, according to our respondents, citizens seem to be indifferent towards the discharge of waste water in rivers and ravines; only a significant proportion of secondary students are aware of the fact that citizens are concerned about this problem. Surprisingly, most citizens and students in the Huitzilac micro basin claim that the accumulation of household waste and land pollution on account of waste water is a result of residents’ “poor environmental education” and, to a lesser extent, of the fact that they do not know how to organize themselves collectively; alternatively, they argue that they in fact do not know what to do with household waste and waste water.



This ordering of citizen's problems and attitudes stems from respondents' life experience, from the information they get from the media, and from their school training. The latter seems to also significantly bear on their perception of the aesthetic value of forests and ravines, and the natural functions thereof.

In the Casino debate, urban civil society got organized and founded the Frente Cívico Pro Casino de la Selva (Casino de la Selva Front, hereinafter the Front), which became the main interlocutor of the municipal and state governments. Subsequently, other Federal Government institutions joined in the process of selling the site and authorizing the project, i.e. the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA, as per its acronym in Spanish) and the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH, as per its acronym in Spanish), both of them often cited and challenged in the debate for not preventing the destruction of mural paintings and because, in the face of the assumed existence of archeological remains on the site, nothing was being done to protect them. Both the INBA and the INAH initially denied having signed an agreement that allowed COSTCO to continue with the construction of the shopping center, although INAH's director agreed that such an authorization might be granted shortly and that, once signed, Cuernavaca's city council would be in a position to issue the land use permit. At the same time, the Front brought to the discussion table information and evidence showing the inefficiency or complicity involved in the authorization of this type of project:

We found out that the registration of the construction works was never made by the INBA as dictated by the Law on Monuments, Archaeological, Artistic and Historical Zones; that no excavations were made by the INAH to check for archaeological remains and ... that the Federal Treasury, through Fideliqu, sold the former Casino as a plot of land at a price of 10 million dollars, when it is valued at over

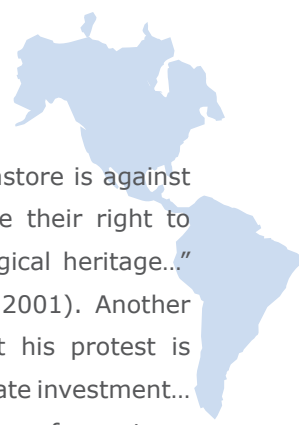
50 million dollars; that the Ministry of Public Works issued a demolition permit even before the company had submitted its project; that the urban development program in force is not being adhered to; that several articles of the State Law on Human Settlements are being infringed... (La Jornada Morelos, Madre Tierra Supplement, November 9, 2001).

The Front challenged the State's legal arguments by claiming complicity on the part of the institutions that should have defended the site's artistic and cultural heritage; they also put on the discussion table a suspicion of corruption from the moment of sale of the site. Corruption and complicity are nearly always part of the framework of political interests, and are part of the history of Mexican State institutions. Another member of the Front described this type of alleged complicities in more detail by pointing to the actual interlocutors:

We are struggling against power and money: against power, in the case of the authorities that act as Costco's spokespersons; and against money, in the case of that big commercial chain (El Diario de Morelos, 2002).

The Front also stated that article 27 of the Federal Law on Monuments and Archaeological Zones was being infringed, since archaeological monuments—both movable and immovable—"belong to the Nation, and are inalienable and imprescriptible."

The suspicion of governmental complicity and corruption is one of the main-- perhaps the most important-- obstacles to citizen participation in civic life. In our survey, those who refused to participate in citizens' actions pointed out that it is because they lack confidence in the authorities, in addition to a lack of resources. Notwithstanding this, citizens and students maintain that neighbors and authorities should jointly participate in the decisions about the environmental problems that affect forests and ravines, along with



the participation of the schools, which according to the students have shown the highest level of interest in dealing with local environmental problems--even more than municipal authorities.

On the other hand, as Bourdieu's theory would suggest, the Front has been progressively constructing its own authority and capability to face this "institutional framework"; the Front forms part of a number of movements that have also arisen to defend Cuernavaca's natural heritage against an urban development project that places little value on green areas and trees. The Front indicates that since 1970 this area has been increasingly devastated by the construction of Superama, another commercial store, by the construction of a library in the Melchor Ocampo park, and the felling "of more than 900 trees so as to build [the shopping mall] Plaza Cuernavaca" (*La Jornada Morelos*, *Madre Tierra* Supplement, July 19, 2001). All these sites are separated from each other by just one street.

In this debate, entrepreneurs argued on their own behalf that the construction of the shopping center would create between 1,200 and 1,500 jobs, and another 500 direct jobs once in operation (*La Jornada Morelos*, *Madre Tierra* Supplement, July 19, 2001). The Front counter-argued that upon completion of the shopping center some 10,000 direct and indirect jobs would be lost. The latter evidence was used in an attempt to convince Morelos' society and public opinion that job creation is not a final argument; it has also been shown that the problem of Cuernavaca's and Morelos' economic development is not necessarily a shortage of jobs, but rather of better paid jobs and of high value-added companies (Tapia, 2006). For people working in Morelos, average compensation is 15% lower than the national average, and for the last 14 years so has been the per capita gross domestic product, though to a lesser extent.

A local deputy of the state government opposition party claims that: "No one amongst those who have

expressed their rejection of the megastore is against the investment, but they do exercise their right to defend everyone's cultural and ecological heritage..." (*La Jornada Morelos*, November 25, 2001). Another member of the Front "asserted that his protest is neither against Costco nor against private investment... they just believe that it is not the place for a store, but rather for culture, for recreational purposes" (*La Jornada Morelos*, December 15, 2001).

The actors in the debate also put forward legal arguments. The legal arguments wielded by the municipality and state government were met by claims against the officials in charge—the municipal president, or INBA's administration—for failure to fulfill their responsibility and for neglect of duties concerning the protection and registration of artistic heritage. In a session of Congress an opposition senator stated that, once the judicial inquiry was completed, the shopping center would be sued for the destruction of artistic heritage. For his part, the municipal president "denied that the municipal administration was guilty of 'omissions' during the remodeling of the former Casino de la Selva and asserted that 'We adhered to the by-laws'" (*La Jornada Morelos*, September 7, 2001).

Acapantzingo and San Antón, localities in the municipality of Cuernavaca situated practically in the center of town, have also been the focus of environmental debate. The debate about San Antón is much older than Acapantzingo's. The latter was more temporary and revolved around civil society's struggle to build an ecological park at the site of the former Atlacomulco prison. In San Antón, civil society's discussion has focused on the abuses by a building company responsible for constructing a housing complex in which a large number of trees, far more than the authorized number, were cut down. After the neighbors' complaint and closure of the works by the city council's ecology sub-department, protests continued because work was resumed four days later without the builders' having to submit to



the penalties imposed on them (*El Diario de Morelos*, March 3, 2001 and *La Jornada Morelos*, September 4, 2001).

Finally, San Antón's oldest and major problem refers to the pollution of the ravine and the Salto (Waterfall) de San Antón. In this case, San Antón's community itself has been the constant and most important interlocutor vis-à-vis government authorities. Like other long-standing discussions about Morelos' environmental problems, this one is characterized by the organization and the projects that have succeeded in creating a citizens' technical committee with specific responsibilities, such as designing programs for territorial and ecological mapping, urban renewal, tourist and educational development, solid waste and waste water management, and public safety (*La Jornada Morelos*, September 20, 2004 and October 12, 2004). Apart from the residents, both the city council and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México have participated in this technical committee, which later became a foundation. During this latter stage, subsequent to the period under analysis, the actions of civil society became consolidated in conjunction with the authorities; however, the debate on the environmental problems of Barranca de San Antón (San Antón Ravine) is still sparked by civil society's actions and alternative projects. These turn into a powerful argument for the development of innovative initiatives to face environmental problems and, if consensus is reached, the municipal government also gets involved.

Pollution of the Apatlaco River is another critical environmental problem and provides an example of citizen debate in the State of Morelos. Pollution problems in the Apatlaco River, the most densely populated sub-basin in the state, date back to the existence of the Ingenio Emiliano Zapata [A sugar processing plant], founded nearly 70 years ago in the municipality of Zacatepec. The Ingenio is the prime source of pollution (Tapia, 2006, p. 22), although there has been a marked increase in pollution due to population growth in Morelos during the last thirty

years. For this reason, the discussion on the pollution of the Apatlaco River is marked by frequent allusions to unfinished projects:

The Let's Save the Apatlaco River project, which was used as a banner to show the state government's interest in participating in solving the environmental problems that society indicates as urgent, was filed away, AURA members said. One of the civil groups that have given a strong boost to the project is the MOCEDMA, which even obtained the support of the United Nations, [and] which fosters the organization's activities through a development fund (*La Jornada Morelos*, May 29, 2000).

Farm producers from Apatlaco's neighboring municipalities indicated that they were able to plant vegetables in the riverbed only until 1990, but that now they are prevented from doing so due to the restrictions imposed by the National Water Commission on account of pollution. A community leader illustrates the magnitude of pollution that goes into the river from part of the largest open-air waste dump in the state, Tetlama:

Roberto Cerveros Silva, communal property president, denounced that for the last fifteen days, after part of the Tetlama's waste dump burned down, seepage of a stinky brownish liquid has polluted four water sources and the upper part of the Apatlaco River; in one week, eighty head of cattle have died from drinking water from the natural drinking troughs (*La Jornada Morelos*, March 25, 2001)².

One of the newspapers analyzed (*La Jornada Morelos*, March 25, 2001) states that pollution of the Apatlaco River is more serious than what the authorities have acknowledged, and it was estimated that there were 204,179 housing units located on the Apatlaco River margins, out of which 113,000



discharge their sewage into the public network, 1,785 do so directly into the river, and 11,203 into the ravines. Meanwhile, the uncompleted projects continue.

By contrast, the head of the State Environmental Commission declared (*La Jornada Morelos*, June 15, 2001) that nine companies were interested in participating in the bidding process for the Apatlaco River Integral Project, and that he “was confident that in approximately four years’ time Morelos would have a completely pollution-free river.” In 2007, under a new state and federal government, discussion of projects for the Apatlaco River has been revived.

The high pollution levels ascertained in Mexico and in Morelos have led President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa to take charge of the Apatlaco River problem, and he called for the three levels of government to come to the rescue and cleansing of the river. The head of the federal government commented to the governor that, “I know that Morelos will collaborate, and if you play your part we will play ours to reclaim that river, but mainly we should stop polluting as we have been doing” (*La Jornada Morelos*, March 23, 2007).

The Chichinautzin biological corridor—hereinafter referred to as “the Corridor”—has faced another major environmental problem for the northern part of the state; for several decades the problem has been subject to public debate, even before the Corridor was declared a protected natural area on November 30, 1988. The Corridor encompasses three federal entities: the State of Morelos, the State of Mexico, and the Federal District. In Morelos, the Corridor spreads over part of the municipalities of Huitzilac, Cuernavaca (in the north), Tepoztlán, Tlayacapan, Tlalnepantla, and Totolapan. It is for this reason that municipalities and their inhabitants have become the government’s primary interlocutors in the debate. The municipalities have filed several requests for privileged access to the forest, claiming that it is they

who have been responsible for the defense and care thereof. Tepoztlán’s residents, for example, have often complained to their own town council for the latter’s lack of knowledge, and their unwillingness to confront the problem of clandestine logging.

In Tepoztlán, as long as town council officials are not aware of the municipalities’ problem—as the case has been so far—it will be difficult to struggle against the conflicts of the locality where they govern, denounced communal property president Francisco Almazán, who added that authorities at various levels have refused to deal with the clandestine logging of trees (“Comuneros”, in *La Jornada Morelos*, March 28, 2000).

Federal authorities’ intervention in the debate with residents about the Corridor’s problems tend to be merely descriptive—e.g. they indicate that the places where illegal logging is worst have been identified, and they list and specify location of the forest management programs underway; however, in reality actions are few and very ineffective. On the other hand, residents’ continuous complaints refer precisely to the lack of action by the various Federal Government departments, and these are suspected of being complicit with logging and land raiding, or illegal land trading. Therefore, a frequent conclusion by residents is to threaten to take justice into their own hands.

Members of Ocotepec’s communal property and ranger commission warned that loggers and land raiders who continue with their illegal activities in the forest of this indigenous community will be arrested and prosecuted by the people. This happened after they noticed during their surveys that plunder had increased and that, therefore, actions to stop deforestation were required... Gilberto Dávila, Ocotepec’s communal property president, said: “We will defend what belongs to us at any price; we are only preventing the forest from becoming extinct and the land from being lost. If they are unable to understand that or their laws do



not allow it... we will continue to look after the forest with machetes and whatever other means available" (*La Jornada Morelos*, April 7, 2002).

Likewise, co-owners from Santa Catarina, Tepoztlán, complain about "state authorities' inaction regarding trespassing and illegal sales... in the ecological zones of Texcal and the Tepozteco National Park," and denounce "the persecution that land defenders are subject to" (*La Jornada Morelos*, October 23, 2002).

However, it should be acknowledged that the inhabitants of the Corridor municipalities themselves are directly or indirectly related to some groups of loggers, because they consider that forestry exploitation is a legacy and a tradition dating back to the Spanish colonial times, continuing through the Porfirio Díaz government (late 1800s), and related to the construction of the México City-Cuernavaca railroad. The chopping down of trees supplied fuel to the sugar mills, or enabled the construction of railway tracks; additionally, the inhabitants of the zone used the wood for building their homes and making coal, or sold construction beams in the neighboring localities (Estrada Iguiniz, 2002, p. 8).

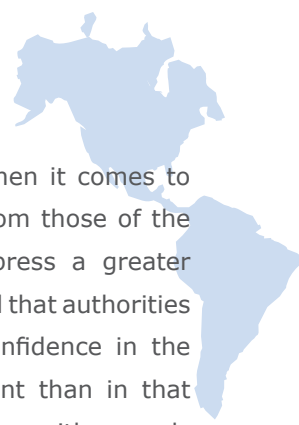
Moreover, once Huitzilac's rights over 11,611 hectares were acknowledged in 1929, exploitation rights were also granted thereto under the provisions of the Forest Law passed in 1926. This law stipulated that only cooperative organizations made up of local neighbors were entitled to engage in wood exploitation, while those individuals acting in their personal capacity could only use the wood as "resources for self-subsistence" (Estrada, op. cit., p. 331). In Huitzilac, those engaging in these activities were called "hacheros" [lumberjacks]. This is why the ban established as a result of the Zempoala lakes and neighboring zones being declared a National Park, as well as the ban established through the new Forest Law of 1947 and through presidential decree (1948), became a permanent source of conflict for the Corridor inhabitants. A text from Huitzilac's inhabitants

addressed to the federal forest authority demanded that they should be included in a forest management plan; they argued that this would also prevent them from being forced, on account of their poverty and lack of work opportunities, to devote themselves to "fraudulent logging resulting in serious damage to our woods" (cited by Estrada, p. 334). Clandestine extraction of wood and forest soil also took place at nighttime in trucks and with chainsaws. Once the Corridor was instituted and permits controlled by the Communal Property Assembly were in place, neither the new regulation nor the inept security has prevented the clandestine extraction of wood and soil. In the end, the inhabitants engaging in these practices claim as follows:

They smuggle it [the wood]. In fact the biological corridor is already in place, they can no longer take out wood. However, the people from Huitzilac... say, 'Why should we give it up if it is our own land?'

They go up to work on the wood and bring it down by nighttime. That man living over here, behind our house, he lives by night. You can always hear a truck leaving at one o'clock in the morning, and they come back around five. They go to work at it during the day. In the middle of the bush, who can see what they are doing? And they bring it down by night. They also deliver it by night. Most of them do that. They do it only by night, because not long ago, perhaps a month or so, a young man in his truck was caught. He was carrying eight beams. He explained that they were only a few. He was going to carry them off during the day. He intended to deliver them in Jiutepec. But he was caught and fined thirty thousand pesos for the eight beams he was carrying. That happened only because he planned to deliver them during the day (a resident of Huitzilac, cited by Estrada, p. 339).

When conflicts such as this arise, both the neighbors involved in forest wood management and



local municipal authorities clash with the federal authorities. Naturally, not all of the inhabitants are involved, because many of them are opposed to forest management. However, the arguments of those who are involved in clandestine logging are also quite powerful, even though some of them collude with each other, and are even accused of starting a fire so that they can later “legally” log trees that are considered “dead wood,” or even others that were not affected by the fire.

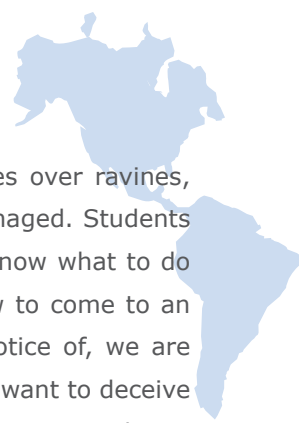
Local authorities in the Corridor justly claim, for example, that their people need to eat, and that they lack the training to compete with city dwellers. They also indicate that those who pretend to be concerned about preserving the Corridor should invest greater resources in local labor, e.g. for digging firewall trenches during fires, cultivating the forest, or combating plagues, and that they should stop suggesting that during fires, “let’s leave those from Huitzilac to combat them.” Residents and communal land-holders believe that the government is mistaken, and although they agree that they should make a living out of the woods in an organized way, they point out that support from the Federal government is also required. Also, they are categorical in asserting that they are not going to starve to death, otherwise “we will all become petty thieves” (cited by Estrada, p. 341). Finally, residents contest the validity of decrees such as the one through which the Corridor was established, which they consider as authoritarian because they were not taken into account. Besides, they claim that no sufficient resources were assigned to enforce it, and that another type of complementary policies were designed, such as for “rural temporary employment,” whose purpose is not to look after the forest, but to create jobs only for two or three months a year.

This perception of how the environmental problems of Huitzilac and the Chichinautzin biological corridor are debated coincides with how citizens in general and the secondary students surveyed perceive those

problems and their participation. When it comes to distinguishing their responsibilities from those of the municipal government, students express a greater commitment than citizens, but demand that authorities participate. They also have more confidence in the intervention of the municipal assistant than in that of the municipal president. At any rate, with regards to illegal logging and forest fires, both students and citizens—the former to a greater extent than the latter—believe that the local and regional population should take charge of solving environmental problems, rather than the government authorities themselves, or even the police or the army.

As we saw from the debate, apart from confrontations, some of which were even solved with violence, there is a process of citizen and governmental construction of the environment through debate, mobilization and practices for dealing with environmental problems. This coincides with our citizen and student survey findings. Notwithstanding the indifference of some, the lack of confidence in the government and the little hope of finding solutions, there is evidence of a large social and citizen capital for dealing with environmental problems, mostly among secondary students. They acknowledge that they do not know what actions to take or how to organize themselves collectively, and they fear that in the end only a small number of people will participate so that they perceive the impact of their participation as very small. In spite of this, many of the lower- and upper-secondary students interviewed would be willing to participate, even with voluntary work and money contributions.

It should be acknowledged that in order to grow and assert this social capital, the government should design policies that set the conditions for this to happen. According to our survey data, citizens’ day-to-day responsibility is largely delimited by the conditions and services provided by government authorities. This becomes quite evident when considering the municipality’s arrangement for household waste



management and collection. Citizens express a strong willingness to use these services and it can be clearly noticed that when such services are inefficient, they resort to burning the waste and, although they will not admit it, they also throw it in the ravine. This may be the reason for their admitting that they do not know what to do with household waste and waste water, apart from the fact that they have little confidence that the authorities will deal with these problems. It should be noted that this answer dates back to before the time of the 2006 household waste crisis that took place in the city of Cuernavaca.

Concluding Remarks: Dispositions and Positions, Matrix, and Product of the Social Construction of Environment and Citizenship

Daily life in the city is seriously disturbed by the construction of a new building (i.e. Costco's) and a new housing complex (as was the case with San Antón), because trees are cut down, or because the "garbage has not been collected" for many days. In the forest, life is disturbed because an inhabitant runs the risk of being imprisoned for trafficking in illegal wooden beams. Close to the river, everyday life is disrupted because polluted water has resulted in cattle deaths or cannot be used for watering crops. As pointed out by Bourdieu, breaching the doxa—in the city, in the forest, and in the river—has created a cognitive subversion, and political action has translated into citizen mobilization and debate.

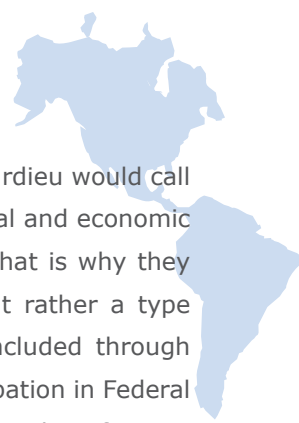
The disruption of everyday life shows that the tacit agreement between citizens—urbanites, peasants, or simply neighbors—and the government has been breached (Bourdieu, 1991, 127). The matrix of dispositions, of all that we do without thinking because that is the way we are and we live, has fallen apart, and both citizens and government must discuss their responsibilities and rights. They need to come to an agreement in order to decide which way to go and who should decide it, who holds the authority to knock down walls and cut down trees, who cares for

the trees and the water, who watches over ravines, and how household waste will be managed. Students and citizens state that: "We do not know what to do or how to organize ourselves, or how to come to an agreement; we are not taken any notice of, we are not taken into account, we think they want to deceive us and we are sure that our rights are not being honored."

Unsure of exactly what to do, but hopeful—as Bourdieu would put it (Tapia, 2002, 187)—citizens undertake social change vested with a utopian democratic vision and acting through speech. Based on a historically learned and locally defined vision of the problem, like in other parts of the world (Klintenberg, Seely and Christiansson, 2007; Wakefield, Elliott, Eyles & Cole, 2006), they seize the street, close the town, confront authority and either delegitimize or challenge it (this is how citizens of the Front acted and how co-owners of the Corridor municipalities act); or they simply lack confidence in projects that are never carried out or are never completed, e.g. the old-time Apatlaco River projects. This is how citizens perceive and debate environmental problems. This is how students learn about them, and this is the way that environmental citizenship is initially constructed: at first as disagreement and subversion (Bourdieu, 1991), and later as debate.

Citizens' utopian vision can be seen in that repeated expression that defends the former Casino de la Selva Hotel facility in order to transform it into a cultural and recreational site, versus the government authorities' vision of creating development and jobs, however poorly paid.

In Bourdieu's language, these visions are also predictive since they aim at reaching the goal of what is said, as citizens did in the case of the park constructed at the site occupied by the former Cuernavaca prison. In the debate, however, acting through words continues, since through an eminently performative discourse (Bourdieu, 1991, op. cit) mobilized citizens



seek to persuade their interlocutors—i.e. government authorities—to change their vision of how the city and the forest should be developed. In a reciprocal manner, these authorities aim at convincing mobilized citizens that they “are the authority” and that they act according to law, indeed that on such a basis they have authorized the construction of the store. They also complain to Front citizens for not having concerned themselves earlier with the neglected Casino de la Selva artistic works and for not fighting for the preservation of the forests. To the peasants and residents of the forest, the authorities complain that they have colluded with loggers. Thus, government authorities justify the legal use of force to imprison Front members when the latter blocked the street or by doing likewise in Huitzilac by sending the police over. Businessmen play an insignificant role in this debate, and they mainly address the authorities; when they address mobilized citizens, they do so in order to tell them that private property cannot be modified except by the owner’s will, disregarding legal provisions for environmental protection.

Those who best illustrate the social force with which mobilized citizens debate government authorities are the students and their vision—utopian precisely because it has not yet been institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1991)—of a government with greater citizen participation: a more democratic society in which neighbors and authorities jointly solve urgent environmental problems of household waste, forests, and ravines. This is the social force that Bourdieu discusses, and whose resonance sustains urban neighbors’ as well as peasants’ mobilization.

The latter’s social force, however, features additional, more powerful historical components. The social force of their discourses, arguments, and political actions is based on their historical right to work the land and look after the forest, even though they may exceed what has been instituted (Bourdieu, 1991) by laws and decrees and be, therefore, unlawful. Peasants have granted that right to themselves in their

capacity as a “practical group,” as Bourdieu would call it, based on their history and the social and economic marginalization in which they live. That is why they do not want assistance programs but rather a type of development whereby they are included through greater citizen and community participation in Federal and state government decisions about their forests, even if this is only to be able to “authoritatively” declare protected natural areas or to develop temporary employment programs.

The social-citizenship force of peasants and urbanites has deep historical roots. Historically, in Mexico elite political compromise has prevailed across the most powerful regional groups. That is why “citizen discontent is felt most at the municipal level” (Hernández, 1996, 28). This discontent, as old as the Mexican Revolution itself, went through a “demobilization” period (Hernández, 1996) when citizens appeared to have traded off “freedom for social protection” (Hernández, 1996).

Such facts introduce nuances into what Bourdieu and Thompson postulate. Demobilization is not only the result of discussion in the public sphere. The exhaustion of explicit and implicit agreements between citizens and the government leads to subversion, mobilization, and debate, as it is currently happening with organized urban citizens, peasants, and forest residents. Historically, after 1950 and markedly since the sixties, “civic, municipal, and urban protest grew” (Hernández, 1996, 31) because the corporate agreements and commitments with labor and peasant organizations through which citizen demand had always been co-opted began to wear out. It is for this reason that Alicia Hernández (Hernández, 1996) asks, “Can Mexican federalism retrain existing institutions and put them at the service of citizens?”

This latter point leads us to attempt to answer one of Bourdieu’s proposals: Beyond gender, age, or origin, who are the citizens of the Front and the residents and communal land-holders of the



Chichinautzin Biological Corridor, of San Antón, or of the Apatlaco River? They are citizens who refused to be “corporatized”—i.e. made members of some state-linked union organizations, such as the teachers’ or peasants’ unions of the Institutional Revolutionary Party. They are citizens who also rejected the chance to belong to a political class which, as Escalante Gonzalbo pointed out, is “a highly restricted and unscrupulous political class” (1992,p.259) that decides on public affairs through a “secret and exclusive pact rather than within the sphere of public opinion open to the argumentative inclusion of different interests” (Aguilar, 1988, p.825). They are also urban and municipal-level citizens—members of the Front and tree guardians—who have taken on the defense of the trees and their city as a prime reference of meaning. Citizens are also peasants, communal land-holders, and residents who take on the defense and use of the natural resources in the forest and the river because that is where they live and where they get their sustenance, and who also refuse to be corporatized and thereby trade off their citizens’ rights for social protection.

Nevertheless, urban and rural citizens are different; in Bourdieu’s terms, they possess different forms of social, economic, and political capital. This can be seen in the different social force with which they express themselves, but also in the way that peasants refer to themselves due to their social condition and schooling. Urban citizens are undoubtedly better schooled, apart from having many other forms of capital not discussed here. The peasants who defend the forest and the rivers inherited the land at a time before the Mexican Revolution (Bourdieu, 1991), and they themselves claim that their social standing based on poverty and lack of schooling prevent them from competing with city dwellers. Both groups, in Bourdieu’s words, are “practical” because their demands for greater citizen participation in a more democratic government have not been instituted in practice, notwithstanding the fact that there are laws to the contrary—(Burki y Perry, 1998, p. 2) such as those stipulating citizen

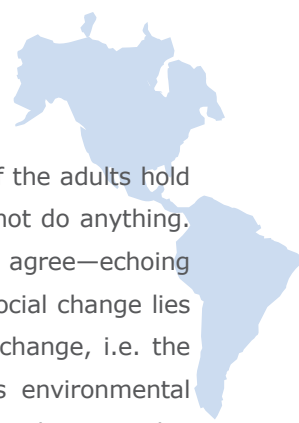
participation in the formulation of municipal, state, and federal development plans³.

The students, future citizens, are the heirs of these identities and dispositions, of these habits deeply rooted not only in history but also in everyday life, hopefully with renewed social capital, new capabilities, and new tasks. Perhaps one of the major tasks for students, citizens, and the government is how to respond to a reformulation of the question posed by Alicia Hernández: Can [the new] citizens contribute to reforming the existing institutions to put them in the service of citizens and for sustainable development? Another task for both current and future citizens and the government is to make Mexican politics truly public, to be of everybody’s concern, so that it stops being as Daniel Cosío Villegas accurately described it:

“[Mexican] politics is not enacted on public squares, the parliament, or the press, in debates or controversies, but rather in face-to-face conversation, through half-spoken words between the aspirant and the holder power” (1966, p.160).

This task is unavoidable not only for current actors, both citizens and the government, but also for the students, because if there is anything we have learned it is that democracy, in any of its forms, is not inherited but constructed. But we must acknowledge the fact that the main obstacles to achieving this utopian vision of democratic development and government are the community’s members themselves—those who accept the government’s arguments and discourse, and those who benefit from exercising power, i.e. our political class and government authorities. This is an important caveat regarding Bourdieu’s arguments, which seem to place stronger emphasis on citizens’ responsibility for social change.

Many positions lose out in this polarized type of debate, as Bourdieu points out; for example, Costco managed to get its store built, and elsewhere



citizens' aspirations to have another park built were not satisfied. Even so, the store was not built as businessmen had planned it, because more trees had to be protected than they would have wanted, and even an arts museum had to be built for exhibiting the mural paintings that the Front was defending—or at least a restored version of them. For its part, now the government has to aim at governing with greater citizen participation. These are some of the new institutional capacities that citizens and government have jointly constructed through debate and negotiation. The latter, to be sure, is not mentioned by Bourdieu. And it is a new starting point for undertaking sustainable development of this Mexican region.

In the context of these new capacities, in the sense mentioned by Bourdieu, it is not proper to undertake a new commercial or industrial development project without taking citizens into account. As Bourdieu also indicates, however, such a context is only helpful as a guideline for practices and expressions, since it does not mechanically determine them; the constant revision of this tacit agreement, and fresh debate, is still pending, I insist, contingent upon a new vision of sustainable development and citizen participation in a politically dynamic Mexico with new issues to be debated.

Meanwhile, the heirs to this debate—i.e. the students from the schools of the San Antón micro basin, from the northern part of the Apatlaco River, and from the Huitzilac forest—together with their teachers, continue to develop and construct their own interest in looking after the ravines, the water, and the forests, within a more democratic government where citizen participation is greater. Likewise, they are willing to act, even if only with the support of government agencies. According to our surveys, both citizens and students are of the opinion that schools and environmental education are the most important factor for dealing with environmental problems, even if this utopian vision contrasts with actual instructional problems, and the cleaning campaigns they organize are insufficient even within the school itself—

apart from the fact that nearly 30% of the adults hold the view that the schools actually do not do anything. In any case, citizens and students agree—echoing Bourdieu—that the main obstacle to social change lies in the orthodoxy of those who resist change, i.e. the indifference of many citizens towards environmental problems, because they accept things as they are. This is one of the greatest obstacles. Another one is the lack of trust in the authorities for failing to take them into account, while still another is the acknowledgement of the limitations of their own capabilities, since they do not know how to organize themselves or how to deal with environmental problems.

As mentioned earlier, the new civic and ethical education curricula for secondary schools now purport to develop “Work Projects” meant to train citizens who will be active, committed, and critical, and who will participate in managing environmental problems and information from the media. The challenge, however, is to provide a type of education that goes beyond simply raising awareness of environmental problems or being merely instructional. The power of the media, as well as young people's lack of interest in public issues, continues to be a huge challenge. According to the preliminary results of the 2005 Youth Survey, only 13.8% of young people in Mexico are highly interested in politics (Pérez Islas, 2006, p. 29). The collective project appears to be a promising teaching resource, and it turned out to be a powerful argument in Salto de San Antón's citizen-government debate for citizenship construction and for being capable of contributing to sustainable development. This is the next link in the process of social construction of citizenship and environment, and in the institutionalization of citizen debate and participation under a democratic government. This is the task for the government, citizens, and students: a more democratic government, in which debate about rights and responsibilities prevent our actors—citizens, governments, and schools—from feeling obligated to question others' authority and to substitute discussion with violence, once everyday life has been disrupted and tacit agreements have been breached.

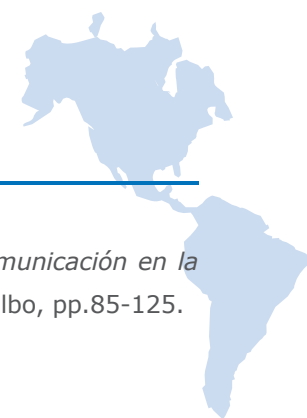


Citizens' social construction of these collective projects, expressing concern for Morelos' environment through public democratic debate, will enable more strongly democratic governments and institutions to evolve. This will make it harder for those who hold power in public spaces to pass on a disdain for democratic debate to the ensuing generations, or to weaken citizens' likely impact on the social construction of the environment.



Notes

- 1** Editors' note: We have translated the Spanish term *formación* here as "education," even though it refers to a broader societal process that encompasses schooling and much more.
- 2** In October 2006, outside the period discussed in the newspapers, the Tetlama waste dump was closed and 4,500 tons of household waste accumulated on the streets of the city of Cuernavaca, city council spokesperson Julio Aranda said. Schools closed down and many families decided not to send their children to those which remained open. Streets were closed and several public demonstrations were staged, one of which marched from the Emiliano Zapata roundabout to the Government Palace. The household waste problem became a major emergent environmental issue.
- 3** The most recent literature (Shahid Javed Burki and Guillermo E. Perry, 1998: 2) acknowledges that there are informal institutions that are guided by their own values and standards, rather than by laws, regulations, and contracts.



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